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## A DEFENSE OF HORACE<sup>1</sup>

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The recent death of Professor Robert Yelverton Tyrrell, of the University of Dublin, has led to many obituary notices and surveys of his published work.<sup>2</sup> The Irish scholar had most of the virtues and a few of the failings of his race. In America he became personally known through his visit of 1893, when he delivered a series of lectures on *Latin Poetry*, on the Percy Turnbull Memorial Foundation in the Johns Hopkins University, as well as single lectures in other eastern universities.

The lectures on *Latin Poetry* were published in 1895 by the Houghton Mifflin Company, and have become very familiar to all students of Latin literature. They are sympathetic, appreciative, inspiring, and brilliant, and it is but natural that they should have had a great vogue and become a sort of *vade mecum* to every Latin instructor.

But in the series there is one essay which differs in character from the rest, and which seems to have been written from a peculiar point of view. The more I read it, the more I am inclined to believe that it lacks the note of sincerity. This is the essay on Horace, and as Horace is one of the writers whom every Latin student knows more or less intimately, this chapter is doubtless one of the most familiar in the book. That Tyrrell himself was well aware that his essay must meet with opposition is indicated by his own statement, that an article which he had written some time before for the *Quarterly Review*, and in which similar views were maintained, "evoked in the London press several letters from country gentlemen and others, who did not even affect for the moment to discuss the

<sup>1</sup> Read before the American Philological Association at its forty-seventh annual meeting, December, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> He died September 22, 1914.

truth of the opinions propounded, but heaped abuse on the writer of the article, who was, fortunately for himself, anonymous."

*Nil de mortuis nisi bonum.* I do not wish to follow the example of the "country gentlemen" referred to, and write an indignant letter to the *Times*, but as I have waited twenty years in vain without seeing any adequate refutation of Professor Tyrrell's arguments, and as his published essay presents a convenient summary of many criticisms that have appeared at various times from various sources, I take up the gauntlet and without "heaping abuse on the writer," I beg leave "to discuss the truth of the opinions propounded."

At the outset, Tyrrell assures us that though Petronius, Persius, Juvenal, Ovid, and Quintilian mention Horace as an important Roman writer, still he doubts "if there is a single recognition of Horace as a Roman poet, and not merely a skillful versifier, before the time of Fronto." Thus, while Ovid calls him *numerosus* or musical (*Trist.* iv. 8. 9), yet "in another passage (*Art. Am.* iii. 333) in which he enumerates and rapidly characterizes the great Latin poets, Virgil, Tibullus, Propertius, Gallus, Varro, we have not a word of Horace." But in the former passage (incorrectly cited, by the way, for it is *Trist.* iv. 10. 49) Horace is one of Ovid's famous contemporaries, named with Macer, Propertius, Ponticus, Virgil, Tibullus, and Gallus, and the reference is extremely complimentary:

Et tenuit nostras numerosus Horatius auris  
Dum ferit Ausonia carmina culta lyra.

As to the second passage, the argument from silence is very insecure, for though Horace is not mentioned among the select poets whom the amorous coquette is to cultivate, yet the great Catullus and Lucretius are also absent, and in the Greek list, which includes Callimachus, Philetas, Anacreon, and Sappho, we fail to find Alcaeus, Simonides, Stesichorus, Ibycus, Pindar, and many other famous lyric writers.

Tyrrell further declares that "Quintilian's estimate of Horace is but moderate," and then cites the famous criticism of the poet as a lyricist, to which we must return later. But how is it that he has omitted all reference to the fact that in the very same paragraph Quintilian names Horace with Catullus and Bibaculus as a writer

of iambic verse, and a little earlier has given him the highest possible rank in the field of satire? *Multum est tersior ac purus magis Horatius et, nisi labor eius amore, praecipuus* (x. 1. 94), "Horace is much more terse and pure than Lucilius, and, unless my love for him misleads me, he is the first [of satirists]." Such an expression of sentimental affection for an author is, I think, unique in Quintilian, and certainly, in the face of this verdict, it is manifestly wrong to say that "Quintilian's estimate is but moderate."

The ancient critic's inclusion of Horace among the iambic writers is, of course, due to the so-called *Epodes*, a name which later editors have given to what Horace himself called *Iambi*. In these the poet takes as his model the biting verses of the old Greek poet Archilochus, whose caustic bitterness of personal satire is to some extent reproduced, though this tone cannot be long maintained by the genial Horace, who even here gives utterance to a lighter and happier note. Thus, the third is an amusing retort on Maecenas, who has played a practical joke on the poet; the thirteenth is a drinking-song in a merry vein; the fourteenth is an apology for not finishing his book, on the pretense that he is in love; and the second is written in an idyllic strain, describing a rich usurer's dream of rural bliss, but showing how, for all the longings of his better self, the poor man cannot break away from his master-passion of money-grubbing.

It is the very irony of the situation, the striking contrast between the better and the meaner natures of the usurer, that gives the poem its appropriate place in this collection of Archilochian *Epodes* (it would be quite out of place in the *Odes*), just as in those dealing with the Civil War (ninth and sixteenth), there is set before us the awful contrast between the happiness of peace and the misery of internal strife. And yet, as there is no reason to doubt Horace's sincerity in depicting the horrors of war, so we may be sure that the beautiful picture of rural contentment accords with the poet's own sentiments as set forth so frequently in the *Odes*, as well as in the *Satires* and *Epistles*.

I am anxious to emphasize this view, because, in the destructive criticism which is too fashionable nowadays, Horace has come in for a goodly share, and this epode has actually been quoted as a

proof of the poet's insincerity. To argue that, because a man assails the vice of avarice by portraying vividly the joys of which it robs us, he can not therefore appreciate those joys himself, is to my mind extraordinary reasoning. As well impugn the virtue of a preacher, because, in his fight with sin, he is eloquent in praise of a virtuous and godly life. And yet Tyrrell argues that this poem is "a clear proof of the poet's insensibility to these pleasures" of country life. He cites as a parallel Calverley's amusing skit about "the city clerk who left the heat and noise and brass bands of Camden Hill to enjoy his well-earned holiday. We read how he laughed when he felt the cool breeze fanning his cheek and the soft spray on his lip, and when all the sights and sounds and fragrances of the country were wafted to him; then how, when he remembered the dusty streets he had left,

at the thought  
He laughed again, and softly drew  
That 'Morning Herald,' that he'd bought,  
Forth from his breast, and read it through."

Is it a fair inference that Calverley (or for that matter even the city clerk) despised the delights of the country and seashore? Yet that is precisely how Tyrrell and the German critics he has followed reason about Horace and the miser of his creation.

As to the *Satires* of Horace, it is easy to trace in them an interesting development in tone and ethical character; yet Tyrrell, in his eagerness to dislodge the poet from his high position, completely disregards this fact. Proceeding on the assumption that the *Satires* are merely a sort of up-to-date edition of the older satirist Lucilius, he refuses to recognize the least originality of thought or design in these compositions of Horace. We are told that Horace "found in the *Satires* of Lucilius not only a rough-hewn commentary on life and manners, but even literary criticism, and easy-going descriptions of everyday events, which only required some polishing and refining to make them thoroughly acceptable to the court of Augustus and the *salon* of Maecenas. In fact, Horace seems to have done for Lucilius very much what Pope did for the coarse tales of Chaucer, for the rough philosophizing of Dr. Donne, and even for the *Epistles* of Horace himself." Whether Tyrrell would allow any

originality to Pope he does not inform us, but though he has such scanty evidence on which to base his conclusion (for Lucilius exists for us only in scattered fragments), he does not hesitate to deny this quality to Horace. If Tyrrell had borne in mind the force of tradition in every field of Latin literature, he would have seen that it was absolutely incumbent on Horace to follow in satire the lead of Lucilius, and that, as in the epic sphere the *Aeneid* is saturated with the language and thought of Ennius, so the satire of Horace must needs be conceived in the atmosphere of Lucilius. And yet there is no more reason to question the originality of Horace as compared with Lucilius, than that of Virgil as compared with Ennius. Instead of dethroning Horace on the flimsy evidence of Lucilius' scattered fragments, let us rather listen again to the verdict of the great critic Quintilian, who had before him not only a complete Horace, but also a complete Lucilius. In the latter we find "wonderful erudition and freedom of utterance, with keen satire and abundant wit, but Horace is much more terse and clear, and unless my love for him misleads me, he is the first of satirists."

Moreover, such adverse criticism as we have been dealing with fails to take more than an extremely slight and superficial view of the *Epistles*, which belong essentially to the same class of literature as the *Satires*, but which exhibit a riper maturity of judgment, a subtler charm of manner, and a greater seriousness of purpose, combined with a consciousness of power, an indifference to criticism, and a perfect refinement of tone. "Good sense, good feeling, good taste," says Mackail, "these qualities, latent from the first in Horace, had obtained a final mastery over the coarser strain with which they had at first been mingled." These *Epistles* are the best expression of that urbanity which has ever been recognized as the most striking feature of Horace; and indeed, so far as the combination of a refinement of mind and a refinement of manner has entered as a distinct factor into modern education, it seems no exaggeration to say that it is due, in no small measure, to the past influence of Horace.

Delightful and successful as are the *Epistles*, so that as models of conversational verse in easy, informal style they have never been excelled, they cannot be said to represent a high type of poetry.

Horace himself speaks of his muse as *pedestris*, prosaic—calls his *Satires* and *Epistles* talks, *sermones*, and describes his verses as *repentes per humum*, “creeping along the ground.” It is for this work that he regarded himself as best adapted by genius, though he was also confident that he had won undying renown by his verses in a loftier strain.

The epithet which Ovid applies to Horace, *numerosus*, is perhaps the best single epithet one can find for him. He is essentially musical, and the greatest charm of his verse is its music. Horace is not a poet of lofty inspiration or imagination. He is essentially a poet of art; and the hold which he has had upon the world shows that the beauty of poetic art—form, rhythm, word-effects—even unaccompanied by the fire of passion, can at times take by storm the human heart. Horace’s *Odes* are perhaps the best illustration of Poe’s definition of poetry, “the rhythmical creation of beauty”; they are also an illustration of the truth that poetry defies definition.

But, we are again assured, Horace is insincere. In his mature years, he sings gaily of love, though he feels not the hot passion of a Catullus. Does this prove his insincerity? Rather, he is an artist, a dramatist, who portrays life, not as he feels it, but as he sees it. Take as an example that delicious scene (*Carm.* iii 9), where two lovers have fallen out, but become reconciled. The little poem is absolutely faultless, but no editor has a right to call the lover Horace. Does not the poem give us as much pleasure as if he were?

And so with the other odes, in which appear Leuconoe and Lydia, Glycera and Chloe, even Cinara. These are largely creatures of fancy, figures from Greek art, quite as much as real objects of the poet’s passing affection. A lyric poet must needs be a lover—an Anacreon if not a Sappho—but Horace’s love is like that of Pygmalion for the statue which he warmed with the breath of life.

Though not the poet of love, Horace may well be called the poet of friendship. His odes reveal a man of warm, sympathetic heart, who has many friends, and “grapples them to his soul with hoops of steel.” Virgil was to him *animae dimidium meae*, while for Maecenas he entertained an almost passionate devotion. Who

that has once heard the phrase, *O dulce decus meum!* does not keep it in his ears? Maecenas has ever been his "pillar of prosperity," but he has also become "heart of his heart," *meae partem animae*:

ibimus, ibimus,  
Utrumque praecedes, supremum  
Carpere iter comites parati.  
[*Carm.* ii. 17. 10 ff.]

This prophecy was almost literally fulfilled when Horace died but a few months later than his great patron.

Love of friends and love of nature are the two main themes in Horace's *Odes*. While still fresh from Greece and Asia Minor, he tells us that while others may praise those famous lands, for himself no place has so smitten his fancy as

domus Albunae resonantis  
Et praeceptus Anio ac Tiburni lucus et uda  
Mobilibus pomaria rivis

It is to Tibur's natural beauties that the poet gratefully attributes his lyric fame:

Sed quae Tibur aquae fertile praefluunt,  
Et spissae nemorum comae  
Fingent Aeolio carmine nobilem.  
[*Carm.* iv. 3. 10 ff.]

But Horace is also a poet of Rome, and even in his lyric strains we recognize something akin to the patriotic fervor of Virgil. "Are not the force and splendor of the patriotic odes astonishing in a master of light verse . . . ?" asks a recent writer in the *Athenaeum*, and then he proceeds with the question, "Whence came this genuine feeling?"<sup>1</sup>

But Tyrrell and the school he represents are not content with slandering the *Odes* as insincere. They are unsound in other ways as well, showing confusion of thought, incorrect Latinity, and even bad taste.

We may at once admit that it is not always easy to follow Horace's train of thought, and in regard to some passages, *quot*

<sup>1</sup> In a review of Dimsdale's "A History of Latin Literature," *Athenaeum*, October 23, 1915.



*homines tot sententiae.* But we must remember that the same may be said of many other great poets, as of Browning, for whom it cannot be claimed that they may have suffered from incorrect transmission of the text. This is probably true, even if no modern editor would go so far as Bentley, who had "recourse to wholesale correction of the text," or as Peerlkamp, who declares: "I do not accept as the work of Horace anything but what is so exquisitely perfect that you cannot change it without spoiling it."

But Tyrrell's illustrations of confused thought, poor taste, and inaccuracy of expression are far from convincing, and in some cases his judgment is obviously due to a superficial consideration of the problems involved. Thus the poet is supposed, *metri causa*, to use *acervos* for *thesauros*,<sup>1</sup> and Tyrrell asks: "Heaps of what?" Of treasures, of course, say the commentators. But Horace has not written "heaps of treasures," he has only written "heaps." Our English expression "to make one's pile" is, of course, purely colloquial; but similar expressions in other languages may be dignified, and that this use of *acervus* was recognized in literary Latin is proved not only by other passages in Horace (cf. *Serm.* i. 1. 44; ii. 2. 105; *Epist.* i. 6. 35), but especially by Tibullus i. 1. 77.

Ferte et opes: ego composito securus acervo  
Despiciam dites despiciamque famem.

"I, in my humble competence secure,  
Shall wealth and poverty alike disdain."

[Cranstoun]

Objection to another passage in the same ode (ii. 2. 10) is refuted by Shorey: "Tyrrell says somewhat captiously, 'What is the meaning of to "join Libya to the distant Gades"?' Surely to unite Africa to Spain by a bridge. But compare the millionaire in Petron. 48, *nunc coniungere agellis Siciliam volo ut cum Africam libuerit ire per meos fines navigem.*"

Horace's use of *ordinat* in *Carm.* iv. 11. 20 seems to Tyrrell unnatural, who thinks the expression

ex hac  
Luce Maecenas meus adfluentis  
Ordinat annos

<sup>1</sup> *Carm.* ii. 2. 24.

ought to mean "from this day forth Maecenas revises the calendar." In this he speaks not only "captiously," as Shorey puts it, but also foolishly, for the meaning of "putting in a row," "arranging in order," "adding to the tale of" (Moore), *ordine numerat* (Orelli), is surely close to the original meaning of the word, and Tyrrell's objection is not unlike that of the would-be critic who claimed that Tennyson misused the word "inform," when he wrote that Freedom

Inform'd the pillar'd Parthenon,  
The glittering Capitol.

Surely, too, the objection to *auritas quercus* (*Carm.* i. 12. 11) is based on an error, for *auritus* does not necessarily mean "long-eared," but simply "provided with ears," and, if the oaks were to hear Orpheus at all, surely they must have had the "ears to hear," and Shorey very aptly compares Milton:

that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard  
In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears,  
To rapture.

In Manilius 5. 322, occurs *sensus scopulis et silvis addidit aures*.

Even if Horace does say "Endure the lamps till dawn," *vigiles lucernas perfer in lucem*, why is this unnatural, in connection with the poet's friendly invitation to his patron to celebrate with him an anniversary? Maecenas, as we know, was a valetudinarian, and doubtless was disinclined to prolong a feast all night. In any case it is presumptuous to assert that the poet "intends to say, 'keep the lamps alight till dawn.'"

All objection to the words,

mea nec Falernae  
Temperant vites neque Formiani  
Pocula colles  
[*Carm.* i. 20. 10 ff.]

must disappear when we recognize the personification of *vites* and *colles*, which by metonymy are used for *vina*. Somewhat similar is the substitution in *Carm.* ii. 2. 12, of *hydrops* for *hydropicus* (Schütz). Few will subscribe to the view that "the comparison between the insatiable desire of riches and the unquenchable thirst of dropsy" is a "tasteless effort of fancy." It is, at least, a familiar idea, which is more fully expanded by Ovid in *Fasti* i. 211-16.

To say that in *Carm.* iv. 1. 21—

Illic plurima naribus  
Duces thura

Horace represents Venus as “snuffing up the incense,” is merely to indulge in parody, for the expression is no more peculiar than *ducere spiritum*, *ducere aerem*, and Moore is right in saying of *olentis uxores mariti* (*Carm.* i. 17. 7) that it is “made offensive by translation.” The expression doubtless belongs to the bucolic sphere, and we may compare the τᾶν λευκᾶν αἰγῶν ἄνερ of Theocritus, *Id.* viii. 49, the πόσις αἰγῶν of *Anth. Pal.* xvi. 17. 5, Virgil’s *vir gregis*, *Ecl.* vii. 7, and Martial’s *pecorisque maritus lanigeri*. Shorey aptly compares Milton’s cock, that

stoutly struts his dames before.

It is unfair to regard certain metaphors and similes which are offensive to modern taste, but which are common in ancient literature, as discreditable to Horace or any other individual writer. All that we should say is that they are alien to present modes of thought, or that they carry us back to a time when cultivated society had not outgrown the connection between its forms of expression and the folk-lore of the race. Thus the use of πῶλος, “colt,” or “filly,” for a young girl, is common in Greek poetry, as in Anacreon 75 and various passages in Euripides. Similar is the use of δάμαλις, “heifer” or “calf,” with μόσχος, πόρις, and πόρτις, and in Latin *iuvencus* (*Carm.* ii. 8. 21) and *iuvenca* (*Carm.* ii. 5. 6). Apart from this metaphor of the heifer, and that of the unripe grape, both of which, however, are Theocritean, while παρθένος ἀδμής is as old as Homer, the fifth ode of the second book is very beautiful, and closes with a most charming picture of the girl Chloris and the boy Gyges:

Non Chloris, albo sic umero nitens  
Ut pura nocturno renidet  
Luna mari, Cnidiusve Gyges,

Quem si puellarum insereres choro,  
Mire sagacis falleret hospites  
Discrimen obscurum solutis  
Crinibus ambiguoque voltu.

And yet Tyrrell can solemnly say of this: "The runnel is exquisitely smooth, but its shallow waters flow where they will, from their natural channel, and end in a puddle."

But the most striking example of what Goethe once severely condemned as Horace's *furchtbare Realität*, is naturally made the most of by Tyrrell, viz., the image, "in which, after comparing himself to a soaring bird, he goes on to describe how the skin is shrinking and roughening on his legs, and pursues the details of an actual transformation into a winged creature."

Iam iam residunt cruribus asperae  
Pelles et album mutor in alitem  
Superne, nascunturque leves  
Per digitos umerosque plumae.

[*Carm.* ii. 20. 9 ff.]

Now it is probably true that today "every reader of taste" must feel repelled by the picture presented, but is it one that is alien to ancient taste and thought? Could not Euripides (Fr. 903) speak of "winging his way to high heaven with golden wings upon his back, and the Sirens' winged sandals on his feet"? Did not Aeschylus actually show on the stage Io transformed into a heifer? Was not transformation into bird and animal forms a commonplace to Greeks and Romans, made familiar to them by innumerable stories in their mythology? Did not Ovid write fifteen books of *Metamorphoses*, a brilliant work of "magic and marvels," drawn largely from such Greek sources as Nikandros of Colophon and Parthenios of Nicaea? And if you want further proof of ancient familiarity with such modes of thought, let me recommend that you glance through Professor E. Whitney Martin's recent book, *The Birds of the Latin Poets*, and there note, from the numerous and interesting facts presented by him, how completely this idea of transformation had passed into daily thought and daily speech. It is the scholar's duty to ascertain the ancient point of view. We may easily conceive how much imagery in our modern poetry would have given offense to the ancients.

But these attacks upon Horace for his misuse of imagery and language may be offset by the very verdict of Quintilian which Tyrrell has cited: *plenus est iucunditatis et gratiae et variis figuris*

*et verbis felicissime audax* (x. 1. 96) "he abounds in sweetness and grace, and is most successfully daring in his varied figures and expressions." The ancient critic declares that in his similes and language Horace is not only *audax* but *felicissime audax*, and we are reminded that a later critic, Petronius Arbiter, praises Horace for his *curiosa felicitas*, "subtle happiness of expression," to take Tyrrell's own rendering.

Finally, let us give a moment's consideration to the words in which Quintilian seems "to damn Horace with faint praise." *At lyricorum idem Horatius fere solus legi dignus; nam et insurgit aliquando*. . . . Even the warmest admirer of Horace will probably agree with Quintilian that the poet's inspiration is occasional (*aliquando*), but he will also emphasize *insurgit*, as well as *aliquando*, and claim that Horace at times shows real inspiration. As to the rest of Quintilian's statement, that "of lyricists Horace is perhaps the only one worth reading" he will remind himself that it is a great compliment to Horace to be included at all in the imposing list of poets and prose-writers which the great teacher drew up for the use of his rhetorical pupils. In such a vocational study-course as is outlined, the lyricists have little to offer, as compared with the writers of epic and drama, to say nothing of the philosophers, historians, and orators; and if any of them are singled out for commendation, they are specially honored. Thus it is that Horace, and Horace alone, is placed beside Pindar, Stesichorus, Alcaeus, and Simonides, the only lyric writers who are chosen for a like purpose from the brilliant galaxy of Greek melic poets (x. 1. 61-64).

"What joy there is in these songs! What delight of life, what an exquisite Hellenic grace of art, what a manly nature to endure, what tenderness and constancy of friendship, what a sense of all that is fair in the glittering stream, the music of the waterfall, the hum of bees, the silvery grey of the olive woods on the hillside! How human are all your verses, Horace!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lang, *Letters to Dead Authors*.